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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001303

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SUBJECT: TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY SO FAR UNHINDERED BY
DOMESTIC EVENTS

REF: ANKARA 1223

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Domestic political uncertainty arising from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) closure case and Ergenekon prosecution (reftel) has not constrained PM Erdogan from painting himself the statesman through bold foreign policy activism. Turkey's foreign and security apparatus continues to pursue energetic initiatives on Middle East peace, Iraq, and Iran, for example, that show less hesitancy to take risks and break new ground. There is support for these policies across the political leadership, MFA bureaucracy, and the military, and even the opposition has held its fire. Involvement of MFA officials and elements of the state bureaucracy imply that these foreign policy initiatives will continue regardless of the outcome of domestic political machinations. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Contrary to expectations, domestic political uncertainty about Turkey's future leadership has not deterred the government from pursuing an ambitious foreign policy agenda. Possibly only weeks away from a Constitutional Court decision that many expect will close the AKP and ban Erdogan from politics, the GOT, often with Erdogan's direct personal investment, is heavily engaged.

- Iraq: Erdogan visited Baghdad July 10 -- the first Turkish PM in Iraq since 1990 -- and agreed to a joint declaration that commits Turkey and Iraq to engage on a host of bilateral political, economic, and security issues. Erdogan's visit followed the long-blocked visit of President Talabani here in March and direct contact between GOT and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) officials in May. The GOT has pursued this approach despite political risks in a period of continued PKK attacks in southeastern Turkey and as military operations in the border region continue. While the Turkish General Staff (TGS) remains deeply skeptical about the KRG and Massoud Barzani, TGS supports dialogue with Baghdad and decided no longer to block government contacts with the KRG.

- Middle East: Erdogan and foreign policy advisor Davutoglu have stepped up their efforts in the region. During the April-May crisis in Lebanon, Erdogan and Davutoglu passed a series of messages among multiple parties in Damascus and Beirut, meriting an invitation for Erdogan to the new Lebanese president's swearing-in in May. Turkey has hosted three rounds of mediation with Syria and Israel, the latest occurring July 1-2; a fourth should occur late this month.

- Pakistan/Afghanistan: Turkey is seeking to calm tensions between Kabul and Islamabad and within Afghanistan itself. It is encouraging Afghan and Pakistani leaders to come

together in Turkey, preferably by September, for a second "Ankara Summit." While continuing to believe President Musharraf can play a role in Pakistan's future, the GOT has pragmatically sought contact with other political factions. Erdogan and President Gul asked visiting Pakistan People's Party leader Zardari to consider co-participation by both Musharraf and PM Gillani, arguing that that this co-participation would send a message of unity. Separately, the Turks have sought to defuse Dostum's clash with President Karzai and worked to ease him out of his present, unhelpful role.

- Caucasus: Senior officials have welcomed Armenian President Sargsian's invitation to President Gul to attend a Turkey-Armenia World Cup qualifier, September 6 in Yerevan. That other work is going on behind the scenes is reflected in the government's forceful defense when press leaks about a move to normalize relations with Yerevan appeared recently. There has been little opposition within the government to date. In coming days, Gul will inaugurate with Presidents Aliyev and Saakashvili construction of the Turkey portion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway connecting Central Asia by rail to Europe.

- Iran: FM Babacan has met with Iranian FM Mottaki four times in June-July, most recently last week. He and MFA U/S Apakan, during political consultations in Tehran in June, have pressed Iran to accept the P5/1 offer. Ankara is tacking between involvement in the diplomatic process (it offered to be a venue for talks as it was in April 2007) and mediation, which it wants to avoid.

ANKARA 00001303 002 OF 003

- Kosovo: One of the first countries to recognize Kosovo's independence, Turkey has remained a staunch Kosovo supporter. It contributed EUR 30 million at the Kosovo Donors' Conference -- the fourth largest contribution after the U.S. and the EU. Press reports indicate Kosovo will soon open an embassy here.

- EU reforms: The GOT has been tepid, but not AWOL on EU reform: an amended Penal Code Article 301 on "insulting Turkishness," a revised foundations law to ease minority problems, and steps toward Kurdish broadcasting on state-run TRT television. The government has kept the EU train on track and persuaded even Paris to relax its opposition to opening new negotiating chapters with Turkey. Erdogan won important concessions to attend the July 13 Mediterranean Union summit in Paris, where his absence would have matched only that of Qaddafi. While there, he continued to help mediate Syrian-Israeli talks by conveying messages between Syrian President Assad and Israeli PM Olmert.

¶3. (C) Many contacts believe Erdogan and the AKP leadership are motivated towards international activism by a desire to project their indispensability to the Turkish people, and to the U.S. and EU. While public opinion on the EU is highly sensitive to perceived opposition to Turkey's accession, the AKP has convinced most observers that it is the party most capable of fulfilling Turkey's EU aspirations. Many of the foreign policy initiatives discussed above support, directly or indirectly, key U.S. and EU foreign policy objectives, e.g., Middle East peace, and stability in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

¶4. (C) Foreign policy activism is consistent with the AKP's vision of Turkey as a determining actor in the international arena. It wants to improve economic, cultural and security ties with neighboring countries by seeking opportunities to promote peace, stability, and a Turkish role. To implement this agenda, Erdogan and Davutoglu have increasingly brought in career MFA diplomats, who add non-partisan credibility and have in turn taken on a strong sense of ownership. For example, the MFA Iraq Special Envoy position, currently held by Murat Ozcelik, has emerged as a driving force behind

improved Ankara-Baghdad relations. Ditto MFA Deputy U/S Sinirlioglu on Israel-Syria and Deputy U/S Cevikoz on Armenia. As a former FM with close ties to the MFA bureaucracy and internationalist instincts, Gul has encouraged and bolstered the standing of Turkey's diplomats. While certain issues, such as Armenia, will require strong advocacy from political leaders, many of these initiatives will have enough momentum to continue through the closure case and beyond.

¶ 15. (C) The Turkish military will continue its role as a foreign policy actor. Despite changes in the senior leadership to be decided upon at the August Supreme Military Council (YAS), we expect little foreign policy change. We expect bilateral military cooperation to continue apace and have no indication that current political uncertainty will cause TGS to rethink this, including on such issues as access to Incirlik Air Base and other military facilities. We do not anticipate any change to Turkish commitments to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The military has raised no objections to the AKP government's Middle East initiatives; expected in-coming Chief of Defense GEN Basbug has publicly welcomed them.

¶ 16. (C) An exception to these good pictures may be Cyprus, where the military has big equities and where nationalist sentiment runs broad and deep. The MFA's approach since Cypriot President Christofias and "TRNC" President Talat started talking earlier this year has been to keep as quiet as possible. With some exceptions, Turkey has taken a backseat and allowed Talat to negotiate. Closure of AKP and the resulting political uncertainty in Ankara could frustrate Talat in the coming months. The longer-term prospects are harder to assess and probably depend on how far beyond the Annan Plan Christofias wants or needs to go, especially on matters affecting TGS interests.

¶ 17. (C) Political opponents accuse Erdogan and Babacan of turning to the U.S. and EU for their defense against AKP's closure, but attacks on the government have largely stopped at the water's edge. With the exception of EU political

ANKARA 00001303 003 OF 003

reforms, neither the Republican People's Party (CHP) nor the far right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) have complained about most of the GOT's foreign policy initiatives and may even support some of them. An MHP Deputy chairs the Turkey-Syria parliamentary friendship committee, and MHP led Turkey's coalition government the last time Turkey and Armenia approached normalization of ties, in 1998. For its part, CHP has tried to profess its support for Turkey's EU accession and opened a representative office in Brussels, even as it challenges nearly every AKP-sponsored, pro-EU political reform in court.

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